



Governor Kim Reynolds
Lt. Governor Adam Gregg
San Wong, Director

ICSAA

Iowa Commission on the Status of African-Americans

Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans
Quarterly Meeting
April 30, 2020
1:00 – 3:00 PM

Due to COVID 19 – Conference Call

Teleconference instructions:
Conference call in number: 1-866-685-1580
Conference code: 5152813855

Minutes

Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 1:10 pm by chairperson Ahmadu Baba-Singhri.

Welcome/Introductions

Present: Ahmadu Baba-Singhri, Negus Sankofa-Imhotep (Clair Rudison), Rosalind Fox, Lynn Sutton

Absent: Mathew Gibson, Ken Morris. Monica Mead, San Wong, Ex-officio

Staff: Kim Cheeks, Monica Stone

Visitors:

Collins Eboh, City of Dubuque, Equity Coordinator, interested in work of ICSAA, also concerned with Governor opening up the state during COVID 19, advocate for those most impacted to the most vulnerable
Jacqueline Hunter, City of Dubuque, Multicultural Family Center director
Temwa Phiri, Dubuque Human Rights Commission, Community Engagement Coordinator
Shante Weston, City of Dubuque, Civil Rights Specialist
Alanda Gregory, City of Dubuque, wants to know what measures can one take in fear of losing their jobs as a result of COVID 19
Dan Larson – West Des Moines, retired, concerned citizen, has time now to volunteer
Charles Hill, Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC), handles employment discrimination cases, joined meeting to hear the voices of people and concerns of ICSAA
Al Womble – Chair Democratic Black Caucus, member of NAACP political action committee
Jaylin Cavil – Eddie Mauro U.S. Senate campaign
Taj Suleyman – Dubuque Community School District, Director of Equity, concerned with number of deaths and positive COVID cases affecting black communities, interested in resources for blacks on the state level during COVID 19
Jeanette Thomas – Iowa Dept. of Education



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Approve Minutes of Oct. 25, 2019

Motion by Imhotep, second by Fox, approved unanimously.

Financial report

Stone communicated there is not a lot of new information to report. The department requested a status quo budget for next year budget we will know more once legislature is back in session.

Public Comment

Commission addressed questions raised regarding COVID 19.

Imhotep – reported ICSAA, Red Cross, Polk County Health Dept. collaborated in a conversation to ask the Governor to report demographics for COVID 19, as far as opening the state. He expressed it seems the economy needs are more important than human life. In regards to employment, he raised Iowa is a right to work state, and he is working three days at home and two at his office building, with some physical ailments himself. Told that concerns have been taken to the governor.

Fox – visited the website coronavirus.iowa.gov, and read the demographics of positive cases impacting black communities. She pointed out that ICSAA has not met to specifically discuss COVID 19, but is hoping to discuss and bring back ways to advocate, and hear suggestions on what the people want to see the commission do.

Question: With the Governor announcing reopening parts of the state – essential workers are going to be affected, if people do not return, they are subject to lose jobs, can the commission support by providing protective equipment, to make sure they are protected?

Baba-Singhri – Feels the proposal is dangerous, in his opinion, will there be a vaccination to treat it, otherwise advises not to return to work until one is found, sees a contradiction, we can social distance but return to work? Employment issue can be addressed with the help of Iowa Civil Rights Commission. The commission can come back with some recommendations.

Fox – Is jotting down some action items, thinks the commission can come up with some recommendations to take to the Governor's office; mandate businesses to have adequate protective equipment, protect those that have preexisting conditions. John Deere, her employer, is giving partial pay to those who can't work due to pre-existing conditions.

Stated the Dubuque leaders are working with various organizations, community leaders, and churches, for meals, educational materials, resources, and assistance with bills. A model to inspire others around the state, to make sure they're impacting community members.

Cheeks - mentioned state level resources listed on the DHR website, and other state websites, such as Dept. of Public Health, Dept. of Education, etc. Regarding the employment issue, at the Gov. press



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conference earlier, Director Beth Townsend talked about people returning to work, if you aren't able there are some specific circumstances you can take to your employer to be considered.

Stone pointed out on coronavirus.iowa.gov, there is a page to address the requirements to reopen businesses for employers, whether they are amenable to the standards of the communities, that would be an issue the commission could address, repercussions not met by the state, and what steps are there to handle the circumstances.

Reports

Director / Division / Office

Stone, reporting in Director Wong's absence, she is the Deputy Director, the Administrator for Community Advocacy and Services (CAS), said DHR has a COVID 19 resource page within its website humanrights.iowa.gov. Click on the COVID 19 tab, listed are a number of resources. The site has language access area, that is now translating Gov. Reynolds press releases, proclamations, and guidance documents in most languages, in voice and writing. Also, on return to work guidance, if losing jobs or changing jobs, exceptions for folks will also be on our site but now on Iowa Workforce Developments site, outlining certain conditions that do not require one to return. Visit the [Testiowa.gov](https://testiowa.gov) if you want to complete the assessment, to see if you're a candidate to test for the virus.

Office report

Cheeks stated a written report was submitted. She would highlight a couple of items; the state 2020 MLK celebration was held in January, and she has been meeting with several organizations about ways to collaborate with the office. There will be a joint collaboration with ACLU on voting law changes and the importance of voting in upcoming primary election June 2.

Commissioners

Fox – nothing to report, glad to have all who joined in the call and glad to hear the concerns so that the commission can address.

Imhotep – will turn in a written report, is working for/with Des Moines Public Schools, concerning those youth who are not in school.

Sutton – most of the businesses in her area have not closed, those that have to work are in meat packing plants, and social distancing is not taking place, and the most impacted are communities of color. People are working infected with the virus. How do we get Gov. Reynolds to put something in place? We are endangering peoples' lives.

Baba - African community has been discussing the COVID 19 issue of those working in production jobs as well, and the best way to deal with it. Security/ Food Security Forum that was to be held at Grand View has been postponed.

Old Business



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Department of Human Rights Board update

Baba reported the board met, the focus was on the US Census and making sure we are counted.

Review notes October 25 lunch & listen Des Moines

Baba felt it was a very good lunch and listen session. Two presentations were about racial profiling. Based on the information, shows we have a lot of work to do. The commission will sit down eventually and address. Second issue was underemployment of the African community. Most are highly educated but find it challenging to find employment, and are working in production jobs, group homes, or _____.

ICSAA Speaker Series next location – Sioux City

Meeting and discussion had to be cancelled due to commissioner obligations and inclement weather. Commission will look at rescheduling.

Strategic Action Plan

Reduce unemployment

Issues impacting employment:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Language | 5. Re-entry; community and employer's acceptance |
| 2. Justice system | 6. Living wage |
| 3. Second chance hiring practices | 7. Media portrayal |
| 4. Nigerian Security and Food Security forum | |

Sutton – unemployment - why people of color are not getting hired, one of the barriers is the person's name, which is racial profiling. An ACLU report – dubbed Iowa 2nd highest nationally in arrests for marijuana. Two years ago, Waterloo was rated the worst place to live, who do we present an action plan. With this ongoing pandemic, food is going to become scarce and the need to get food to our populations. Employer just closed in Dubuque that employed 250 people.

Charles Hill — noted ICRC wants to investigate any and all cases of racial profiling, please let Iowans know they can submit their complaints at ICRC

Jeanette Thomas – suggested on the unemployment/underemployment issue, that the commission look at the former lawsuit against the State of Iowa.

Baba-Singhri – Suggested, look at Programs - second chance hiring practices – Iowa needs to embrace, people have a right to work. Nigerian Food Security / Security Forum delegate came in October, and met with Status of African-American staff, and with commissioner Fox at John Deere, to find ways to address security and food security.

Sutton stated, Iowa has one of lowest living wage, and candidates do not want to raise the minimum wage, the need to advocate for raising it, especially in these times.



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Black Family Forums

Imhotep, capitalism plays a key role in affecting black folks. Feels we need to look at the financial and re-entry side, reacquainting those who've been incarcerated in returning to the family.

Hill – expressed he feels whites in Iowa should/want to know how to address social injustices, calling out what they are, how all key parts can work together, people don't believe racism happens, Iowans have biases, some implicit and explicit, and they need to be addressed so that we can have a fair and just society.

Baba – the main issue is employment, if you look at the stats, black employment is the lowest. We have a lot to do, and the commission does not find it acceptable. One specific issue is, language, employers ask for bilingual, complaint is most Africans are multilingual, speaking at least 3 languages, how does the commission address it, and make it equitable.

Imhotep – sees the issues have been compounded by COVID 19, many of the organizations that have resources people need are shut down. Need to be concerned about the economy because looks like it's going to be shut down. Talking about the issues are good, but we have to look within ourselves to find answers, especially for our families and our communities. There is a need for more black businesses. Might be 482 inmates released this month from Iowa correctional facilities, what will be done.

New Business

Impact of COVID 19 on Black Iowa

Discussion above all pertinent to this item. Commission will gather soon to develop plan to address the urgent concerns.

Farewell to Commissioner Imhotep

Expressions of thanks were given to Commissioner Imhotep for all his work and service to the Black Iowans.

Next Meeting

Not discussed due to time.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Imhotep, second by Sutton, meeting adjourned at 3:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kim Cheeks

Kim Cheeks, Recorder